



Convention on the Rights of the Child

Distr.: General
30 January 2018

Original: English

Committee on the Rights of the Child

Seventy-seventh session

Summary record of the 2265th meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Tuesday, 23 January 2018, at 9 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Winter

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The meeting was called to order at 9.05 a.m.

Consideration of reports of States parties (continued)

Combined second and third periodic reports of Solomon Islands (CRC/C/SLB/2-3; CRC/C/SLB/Q/2-3 and CRC/C/SLB/Q/2-3/Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Solomon Islands joined the meeting via video link.*
2. **Mr. Alependava** (Solomon Islands) introduced the combined second and third periodic reports of Solomon Islands (CRC/C/SLB/2-3) by first providing a brief introduction to the history, geography and economy of the country, which had gained independence in 1978.
3. He said that the Government had made significant progress in a number of areas since it had last reported to the Committee. Examples of legislative reform included the entry into force of the Family Protection Act 2014 and the Penal Code (Amendment) (Sexual Offences Act) 2016, and the enactment of the Child and Family Welfare Act 2017. Discussions were under way to draw up a youth justice bill which would raise the age of criminal responsibility from 8 to 12 years and provide for separate custody and detention facilities for minors. In collaboration with the judiciary and with support from development partners, the Government had established a juvenile court to hear family and juvenile matters. In order to combat human trafficking, it had established a trafficking in persons advisory committee.
4. Regarding recently introduced policies, the National Development Strategy 2016–2035 included measures to promote gender equality, support disadvantaged and vulnerable persons and ensure access to free, high-quality early childhood and basic education. The Government had developed guidelines for caring for survivors of sexual and gender violence, particularly child victims, and had introduced a national referral network for women and child victims. With regard to programme initiatives, the Government had launched a project to improve access to justice under the Family Protection Act, including by training judges on how to implement the Act, and had introduced a system to facilitate the registration of births.
5. Solomon Islands had achieved a number of its health-related targets under the Millennium Development Goals, including those related to reducing child mortality, increasing measles vaccination coverage and combating malaria. It had been granted funding from the GAVI Alliance to further improve vaccination coverage and introduce new vaccination programmes. In the area of education, government funding had helped achieve a 100 per cent transition rate from grade 4 to grade 9 and a high level of gender parity in primary education; support had also been provided for school infrastructure projects. The universal age for pre-primary education had been set at 5 years, and community-based centres had been integrated into the education system.
6. A number of challenges remained, however, in particular those posed by the geographical spread of the population, financial, human and technical resource constraints and cultural diversity.
7. **Mr. Nelson** (Country Rapporteur) said that he wished to know when the Child and Family Welfare Act 2017 would come into effect; how the State party intended to ensure that both that Act and the Family Protection Act were implemented; and whether any steps had been taken to raise awareness among the public of the protections provided by those laws. He also asked when the Government intended to raise the minimum age for marriage and the minimum age for work. It would be useful to know what the results of the review of the National Children's Policy for 2010–2015 had been and whether the policy would be replaced. He also asked whether there was a comprehensive system for data collection; what the results of the Demography Health Survey 2015 had been; whether the survey had covered children with disabilities and children in outlying islands; and whether there were any new initiatives to raise awareness of the Convention in schools. He also encouraged the State party to appoint a children's rights commissioner to ensure the independent monitoring of children's rights.

8. While acknowledging the difficulty of challenging cultural attitudes to corporal punishment, he asked when the State party intended to adopt a law banning its use. He commended the laws introduced to combat the abuse, neglect and sexual exploitation of children and asked whether the police had been granted additional resources to enforce the laws, whether specialist units had been established within the police and whether there were any community-based programmes to combat violence against children. It would also be interesting to know whether there were any shelters for victims, whether such shelters provided counselling and reintegration services and whether the State party had considered introducing a helpline for reporting abuse.

9. With regard to juvenile justice, he wished to know whether training was provided for judicial and probation officers; when juvenile courts would be established in all parts of the country; whether separate juvenile detention facilities would be established; and whether any alternatives to custodial sentences were used.

10. **Mr. Mezmur** (Country Rapporteur) said that he wished to know whether out-of-hospital births were registered; whether the criminalization of the failure to register a birth discouraged residents from reporting births; and what the penalties for failing to register births were. Noting that, according to the State party's report, birth registration had increased from 0 per cent to 40 per cent, he asked in what year that had been achieved. Given that dual nationality was not recognized, he wished to know what measures were in place to prevent statelessness.

11. It would be interesting to know whether minimum standards of care and monitoring mechanisms for care — in particular kinship care — had been adopted; whether family-based care for children without families would be expanded; and whether institutions in which children were housed were inspected regularly. He asked what was being done to promote adoption and whether there were any risks associated with informal adoptions within families.

12. With regard to children with disabilities, it would be interesting to know what steps had been taken to promote inclusive education; why funding had been reduced for community-based rehabilitation; and what was being done to cope with the fallout of those cuts. He would also welcome information on efforts to improve the accessibility of health and justice services.

13. While welcoming the information provided on health services, he would be interested to know more about the successes and challenges of the Government's efforts to improve vaccination rates. In addition, it would be interesting to have an update on the prevalence of tuberculosis and malaria, including figures for 2016 and 2017. He would also like to know whether the Government had any plans to review the legal status of abortion, which was a criminal offence even in cases of rape or incest; how effective awareness-raising of sexually transmitted infections and mother-to-child transmission of HIV among adolescents had been; and whether the Government's policy on breastfeeding had yielded positive results.

14. He would welcome details of how the State party's long-term strategic plan and medium-term national education action plans would facilitate the roll-out of free primary and secondary education. He also wondered what the Government was doing to provide textbooks in languages other than English, which was the second or third language of many children, and how many of the 75 per cent of children who currently transitioned from year 9 to year 10 were girls. Furthermore, he would welcome information on the steps taken to prevent absenteeism.

15. Given the lack of any policy or social programme for the prevention of child labour, he would be interested to hear how the Government planned to address the exploitation of children in such industries as fishing, logging and tourism. He would also welcome information on how the State party intended to curb domestic child trafficking, which was not currently criminalized. Lastly, the Committee was concerned about the reported sale of girls to foreign workers. What measures was the Government taking to address that issue?

16. **Ms. Otani** said that she would like to know what was being done to end discrimination against children in rural areas and children with disabilities, in particular to

improve their access to services. She welcomed the State party's efforts to incorporate the principle of the best interests of the child into various regulations. In that connection, she would appreciate information on the implementation measures taken, the training provided for relevant professionals and whether that principle had been included in the Youth Justice Bill. She would also like to know what had been done to ensure that the right of the child to be heard was known, properly understood and implemented by all relevant decision-making authorities, as well as by families and by school and community actors. Noting that the development of disaster emergency and contingency plans for schools, referred to in paragraph 49 of the State party's replies to the list of issues (CRC/C/SLB/Q/2-3/Add.1), provided a good opportunity to give effect to children's right to participation, she wished to know whether schools were asked to involve children in developing those plans.

17. **Ms. Ayoubi Idrissi** said she would be grateful to know what steps had been taken to protect children from the threats posed by the Internet while guaranteeing their independence. What was being done at school and in the family setting to raise children's awareness in that regard so that they could better protect themselves?

18. **Mr. Rodríguez Reyes** said that he would welcome information on the proportion of hospitals that had been certified as baby-friendly by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Further, he wished to know what the State party had done to counteract tobacco, alcohol and substance abuse among young people, about which the Committee had raised concerns in 2003. Lastly, he would like to know what social support measures would be taken to complement the *wantok* system with a view to fully meeting the needs of children, adolescents and mothers.

19. **Ms. Khazova** said that, as she understood it, the Mental Treatment Act was still under review and that the national policy on mental health had yet to be approved. If that was the case, she wondered when the Government expected those instruments to be adopted and whether it envisaged that their adoption would lead to significant improvements in access to and the quality of mental health services. In addition, she wished to know whether the State party intended to introduce sex education in all areas of the country, including remote areas, and to develop a comprehensive sexual and reproductive health policy for adolescents.

The meeting was suspended at 10.05 a.m. and resumed at 10.20 a.m.

20. **Mr. Lusi** (Solomon Islands) said that the Ministry of Health and Medical Services and the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs had allocated resources for the implementation of the Child and Family Welfare Act during 2018. Activities already undertaken in that connection included a community facilitation package that had been developed in collaboration with UNICEF to promote positive parenting. In relation to the Family Protection Act, training had been provided to public officials, including members of the police and the judiciary, and an advisory council on family protection had been established. Furthermore, the Government had produced materials to help raise children's awareness of protection orders. The related advocacy plans were currently being finalized. Consultation on the renewal of the National Children Policy had been delayed but was due to begin shortly with the support of UNICEF. The Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs was collaborating with the Solomon Islands National Statistics Office to obtain statistics on child protection. However, other services needed to be consulted, for which further resources and technical support were required. The Committee's concerns about the time taken to establish a mechanism for the independent monitoring of children's rights had been noted. The Government would endeavour to address that matter in the near future.

21. **Mr. Lumina** said that he wished to know what steps the Government had taken to reduce the heavy reliance of Solomon Islands on foreign assistance to ensure the sustainability of budgetary allocations to the social sectors, particularly those supporting the rights of children. In that connection, he wondered how the Government ensured that its priorities were aligned with those of donors, particularly with regard to children's rights.

22. **Mr. Alependava** (Solomon Islands) said that the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs intended to gradually increase its budget over time and thus reduce its dependence on financial assistance from foreign development partners.

23. **Mr. Lusi** (Solomon Islands) said that children's views were taken into account in family meetings, which were instigated by the Director of the Social Welfare Division when concerns had been raised about a child's well-being.
24. The Internet and new technologies posed increasing threats to children. Accordingly, schools had taken steps to prevent children from bringing their mobile phones into the classroom and to provide monitored Internet access.
25. **Ms. Kohata** (Solomon Islands) said that the SAFENET referral network, which included the Ministry of Justice and non-governmental organizations, conducted awareness-raising programmes on the use of protection orders. However, the programmes, which were focused on schools, might be discontinued because of funding issues.
26. The Law Reform Commission was currently reviewing the Penal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code. The age of criminal responsibility was one of the subjects which would be addressed in the process. The Commission had also been tasked with reviewing the Islanders Marriage Act, which provided for the minimum age for marriage, but priority had been given to the aforementioned codes. Nevertheless, sexual offences committed against girls under 15 years of age were addressed in the Penal Code (Amendment) (Sexual Offences) Act. The review of personal harm offences was expected to address the issue of corporal punishment.
27. The enforcement of court orders was hampered by resource limitations and geographical factors. However, development partners had worked with the police to find solutions to the problem, particularly regarding the enforcement of protection orders in abuse, neglect and sexual exploitation cases. Police units specialized in family violence and sexual assault assisted with awareness-raising concerning domestic violence and the prosecution of sexual offences.
28. **Mr. Nelson** asked how long the Law Reform Commission's review was expected to take.
29. **Ms. Kohata** (Solomon Islands) said that the time frame for the Commission's review was largely dependent on capacity-related factors. In connection with the review of the Juvenile Offenders Act and the proposed Youth Justice Bill, training had been delivered to lawyers in early 2018; there were plans to provide such training to judges, corrections officers and other officials later that year. Juvenile offenders were held separately from adult offenders within the same detention centre, rather than in entirely separate facilities. A helpline had been established to support victims of gender-based violence and sexual assault. However, her Government acknowledged that a helpline specifically aimed at child victims merited consideration.
30. **Mr. Nelson** asked whether juvenile offenders were given free legal representation or counsel.
31. **Ms. Kohata** (Solomon Islands) said that juvenile offenders had access to free legal counsel at all stages of the criminal process. The Government would give due consideration to the issues raised by the fact that failure to register a birth constituted an offence. Statelessness was currently not an issue for the country. Although no written rules governed customary adoption practices, amendments to the Adoption Act provided for certain protections in the context of informal adoption. Abortion was an offence under current laws; however, the matter was being addressed as part of the review of the Penal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code. The Penal Code (Amendment) (Sexual Offences) Act provided for increased protection against the sexual and economic exploitation of both girls and boys. The Act also addressed child marriage for economic benefit. Finally, in the absence of formal social security systems, the traditional *wantok* system provided significant support for families and children.
32. **Mr. Rodríguez Reyes** said that, although he acknowledged the value of the *wantok* system, he wished to know what measures had been taken to establish a more permanent system of social security in the State party.

33. **Ms. Kohata** (Solomon Islands) said that the Child and Family Welfare Act addressed the issue. The system had been improved and there was a legislative framework for assessing the circumstances of a child needing care and protection.

34. **Ms. Kenilorea Hanu** (Solomon Islands) said that the Office of the Attorney General had been working with the Ministry of Justice on the Youth Justice Bill, which was in the early drafting stage. The Bill addressed key Convention principles concerning children in conflict with the law, including the best interests of the child and detention as a last resort. Just as the Child and Family Welfare Act upheld principles related to family responsibilities, the Youth Justice Bill contained provisions on family and community involvement in the support given to children requiring assistance. As part of protective measures related to access to the Internet, the Penal Code (Amendment) (Sexual Offences) Act criminalized the posting of inappropriate pictures of children on the Internet. The Office of the Attorney General was closely involved in reviewing the proposed reforms of the Mental Health Act.

35. **Mr. Akosawa** (Solomon Islands) said that the Immigration Act criminalized the trafficking of children, empowered police and immigration officers to deal with trafficking cases and provided for penalties for persons who trafficked children under the age of 18 years. Plans were in place to review the Labour Act in order to harmonize its provisions with the Immigration Act in that regard. The Immigration Act also provided for the prosecution of internal trafficking offences. There were two shelters operated by the police, as well as other, church-run shelters, which provided minimum support for trafficking victims. Owing to limited resources, those shelters were currently unable to offer proper clinical care, including psychosocial support, or rehabilitation services. A national action plan covered specialized training for law enforcement officers and persons working with victims of trafficking.

36. **Mr. Bainivalu** (Solomon Islands) said that efforts to meet vaccination targets faced a number of challenges, including the maintenance of a cold chain system. Following a review of the current system conducted with relevant partners, the Ministry of Health had made submissions for resources for the coming five years in order to address the issues identified. Other challenges included geographical factors and funding-related issues regarding, for example, the training of health personnel in the proper use of vaccines, their storage and distribution.

37. The Ministry of Health and Medical Services had decided to review and update the breastfeeding policy. The areas it had identified for improvement included coordination at the national and provincial levels, for instance among nutrition committees, which were encouraged to focus on the importance of breastfeeding. Health-care workers and mothers were alerted to 10 important breastfeeding points, and awareness of the benefits of breastfeeding was promoted in local communities and in private and public schools. The Government planned to adopt the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes and to review the National Food Security, Food Safety and Nutrition Policy. With regard to UNICEF standards, one hospital at the national level was recognized as mother-friendly and three hospitals at the provincial level were recognized as baby-friendly.

38. The success of the programmes to combat tuberculosis and malaria was attributable to effective leadership over the 5-year and 10-year periods, action to review and update guidelines and policies based on evidence drawn from regional and international studies, and the use of diagnosis, treatment and management technology.

39. **Mr. Rodríguez Reyes**, referring to the four hospitals that had been recognized as mother-friendly or baby-friendly, enquired about plans to ensure that the remaining hospitals could be duly certified.

40. **Ms. Aho Assouma** said that she was concerned about the low rate of child vaccination and would like to know about the scale of the budget allocated to health care. She asked whether health-care staff were trained to assist mothers immediately after they had given birth. She also wished to know whether the State party benefited from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, whether mosquito nets were distributed and whether health-care policies and programmes were applicable throughout the State party, including in detention centres.

41. **Mr. Bainivalu** (Solomon Islands) said that the country was served by nine hospitals. The Reproductive and Child Health Division of the Ministry of Health and Medical Services was seeking accreditation for the five hospitals that had not yet been recognized as baby-friendly. Solomon Islands had received funds from the Global Fund and had applied for additional funds for the next three years for the malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS programmes. Catch-up programmes for children who had not been vaccinated were run by the Reproductive and Child Health Division. Sex education had been included in the secondary school curriculum.
42. With regard to substance abuse, the Tobacco Control Act 2010 prohibited the sale of tobacco to minors under the age of 18. There were no-smoking zones in schools, public places and public transport, and awareness-raising programmes were conducted in schools and the media. The Government was reviewing the Liquor Act in collaboration with the police force and the health sector.
43. **Ms. Aho Assouma** said that she would welcome information on action to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS, especially in remote areas. She also enquired about access to health care in areas where clinics had been closed down.
44. **Mr. Bainivalu** (Solomon Islands) said that guidelines on the prevention of parent-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS had been issued shortly after the turn of the century. New draft guidelines had recently been developed together with a policy to address the problem, including option B+, which had been recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO). Regarding the closure of clinics, the Government had stated that it was committed to reopening clinics that had been closed over the previous five years and was assessing the relevant infrastructure, funding and human resource issues.
45. The education sector had developed a policy aimed at including children with disabilities in the education system. A rehabilitation programme was being implemented in coordination with stakeholders, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, and clinics were designed to be user-friendly for children with disabilities. The 2016 Mental Health Bill had been reviewed in November 2017 with WHO technical support. It was hoped that the bill would shortly be enacted.
46. Birth registration had increased following the launch of a new system in 2013. When babies were born outside health facilities, the births were registered as soon as the mothers brought them to a local health-care centre, and the paperwork was forwarded to a provincial centre for further processing. The National Statistics Office was responsible for data management. The Demography Health Survey had been released in June 2017 and was available online.
47. **Ms. Lilo** (Solomon Islands) said that the long-term goals of the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development were to ensure universal access to high-quality basic and secondary education by 2030, and to improve access to early childhood education and care and to technical and vocational training. The midterm goal was to ensure that most girls and boys had access to free and high-quality basic education by 2020. Teacher absenteeism stood at about 20 per cent and the monitoring of about 10,000 teachers presented a major challenge. The target for 2020 was to reduce absenteeism to 7 per cent.
48. English was the official language, but a vernacular language policy was being piloted in two provinces. The pilot project would be evaluated during the current year. The aim was to build a strong foundation for children in their mother tongue prior to their transition to the English language. There were plans to translate the curriculum into diverse local languages.
49. The Education in Emergency Policy was to be reviewed during the current year. Children were involved in planning and decision-making for the disaster emergency and contingency plan for schools. A gender parity policy was being developed for the education system and should be completed during the current year.
50. **Mr. Rodríguez Reyes** said that he would appreciate further information on policies aimed at reducing alcohol consumption by young people.

51. **Ms. Aho Assouma** asked whether education was compulsory and enquired about children's average age of enrolment in primary school and completion of primary education. She asked why many children failed to enrol and why about 30 per cent dropped out before the end of their primary studies. Were children informed in school about sexual and reproductive health?

52. **Mr. Mezmur**, referring to the transition and access rates reported in the replies to the list of issues, asked whether there was gender parity in the access rates from year 9 to year 12, whether children with disabilities failed to transition and, if so, what action was being taken to address those challenges. He would like to know the root causes of student absenteeism and action to address the problem. The sale of girls to foreign workers for sex and marriage was a critical issue, particularly since parents were also involved in such sales. He asked how the issue was being addressed. Birth registration data regarding children who were born outside of wedlock, especially to adolescent mothers, were reportedly often inaccurate. How could such inaccuracies be remedied?

53. **Mr. Nelson** said that he would like to hear about recent action to raise awareness of the Convention and to promote its dissemination. He asked whether shelters were available for child victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse. A great deal of legislation was submitted to the Law Reform Commission. He asked whether priority could be given to legislation dealing with children's rights and issues.

54. **Mr. Bainivalu** (Solomon Islands) said that the Ministry of Health and Medical Services was developing an adolescent health strategy to address problems of substance abuse in collaboration with the National Non-Communicable Disease Programme. The National Statistics Office and the Ministry of Health and Medical Services were discussing procedures for dealing with the issue of birth registration outside wedlock, especially measures to identify the father. Short-stay shelters were available for child victims of sexual or gender-based violence, and the Christian Care Centre served as a long-term shelter. However, the shelters tended to focus on women victims of sexual violence.

55. **Mr. Lusi** (Solomon Islands) said that action to raise awareness of the Convention was taken primarily at special school-based events. Posters, pamphlets and other advocacy materials were used for the purpose.

56. **Ms. Lilo** said that education was currently not compulsory, but it would be rendered compulsory when the Education Bill was enacted. Children were enrolled in primary school at the age of 6 and left at the age of 11. The Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development was gathering baseline data to address the phenomenon of school dropout by girls. Child absenteeism was a major challenge for safety reasons. Many young children had to cross rivers to reach their schools and accidents could occur, especially in rough weather.

57. **Mr. Akosawa** (Solomon Islands) said that two perpetrators had been arrested for internal child trafficking. The case was currently before the courts and the victims had been referred to a shelter. Another case was under investigation.

58. **Ms. Kohata** (Solomon Islands) said that the review of the Penal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code by the Law Reform Commission covered many cross-cutting areas in terms of criminal offences. It had led to the adoption of the Penal Code (Amendment) (Sexual Offences) Act, the Family Protection Act, and the Child and Family Welfare Act, and to the drafting of the Youth Justice Bill. Issues related to children were addressed in all the legislation.

59. **Mr. Mezmur** said that the key challenges facing the State party included the geographical environment in which it operated and the availability of financial and human resources to address problems such as violence against children, access to education, birth registration and other issues. He recommended that children's rights under the Convention should be adequately addressed in the legislation that was currently being drafted and that serious attention should be given to the Committee's concluding observations and recommendations.

60. **Mr. Alependava** (Solomon Islands) said that the interactive dialogue with the Committee would assist his country in developing strategies to address the issues raised and

to implement the Convention. Additional responses would be submitted in writing within the next few days.

61. As noted by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade, the small economy, limited market opportunities and topography of the Solomon Islands limited the country's ability to provide its people with access to services. However, the Government remained committed to meeting its obligations under the Convention.

The meeting rose at 12.05 p.m.